

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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EXDIS

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TAGS: PEPR, PINS, LE, SY, IS

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH SYRIAN CHARGE ON LEBANON

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1. DRAPER (NEA) ASKED THE SYRIAN CHARGE ABOU SHAHR TO MEET ON AUGUST 30 TO DISCUSS SITUATION IN LEBANON, FOLLOWING UP AMBASSADOR SEELYE'S MEETING IN DAMASCUS WITH ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER QADDOUR (REFTELS). DRAPER REVIEWED MAJOR POINTS IN STATE REFTTEL, AND PARALLELED SEELYE'S PROPOSALS THAT SYRIANS CONSIDER ANNOUNCING AN EARLY INTENTION TO WITHDRAW SOME TROOPS FROM LEBANON OR UNILATERALLY TO DO

SO, AS AMONG WAYS WHICH MIGHT ASSUAGE CONCERNS OVER ULTIMATE SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON. SYRIAN CHARGE ASKED WHERE WERE SYRIAN INTENTIONS QUESTIONED. DRAPER SAID THESE SUSPICIONS EXISTED AMONG SUBSTANTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN LEBANON, IN ISRAEL, AND IN IMPORTANT PARTS OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC AND CONGRESS, PARTICULARLY THE AMERICAN-LEBANESE COMMUNITY. THE SYRIAN CHARGE THEN PRESSED BY ASKING WHETHER THERE WERE DOUBTS WITHIN THE USG. DRAPER REPLIED THAT THERE WERE STORIES CIRCULATING IN LEBANON TO THE EFFECT THAT SYRIAN MILITARY OFFICERS THERE WERE TALKING ABOUT CRUSHING THE MARONITE MILITIAS MILITARILY ONCE AND FOR ALL. CONTINUING, DRAPER SAID THAT

THERE WAS A GOOD DEAL OF EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT SYRIAN MILITARY OFFICERS ON THE GROUND APPEARED IN SOME CASES TO HAVE EXCEEDED THE POLICY GUIDELINES LAID DOWN BY DAMASCUS. WE HAD NOTED THAT THE ADF HAD ANNOUNCED THAT INDIVIDUALS GUILTY OF CRIMES AUGUST 28 IN THE REGION OF THE CEDARS WOULD BE TRIED AND PUNISHED, AND WE WERE GLAD TO SEE THIS.

2. ABOU SHAHR STRESSED THAT SYRIAN POLICY HAD NOT CHANGED, AS HAD BEEN MADE CLEAR EARLIER BY FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM TO AMBASSADOR SEELYE AND THAT VERY DAY BY ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER QADDOUR. THE ONLY LEBANESE WHO HAD ANYTHING TO FEAR FROM SYRIAN FORCES WERE THE MARONITE
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MILITIAS. THEY REPRESENTED ONLY A SMALL PART OF THE LEBANESE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, WERE SUPPORTED BY ISRAEL, AND WERE CARRYING OUT ISRAELI POLICY. ISRAEL HAD PREVENTED THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE LEBANESE ARMY FORCE TO SOUTHERN LEBANON, AND WAS PREVENTING THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT FROM RESTORING ITS AUTHORITY IN THE SOUTH. SYRIA HAD NO TERRITORIAL AMBITION IN LEBANON, BUT WAS AFRAID ISRAEL DID (I.E., THE LITANI RIVER). THE PINCER OPERATION IN THE NORTH MENTIONED BY SEELYE AND DRAPER HAD BEEN COORDINATED AND DISCUSSED WITH THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT. (ABOU SHAHR IMPLIED THAT THE OPERATION HAD ALSO BEEN DISCUSSED AT THE BOUTROS/ASSAD MEETING IN LATAKIA AUGUST 28.) SYRIA NATURALLY REGRETTED ANY INCIDENT WHICH HAD CAUSED THE LOSS OF CIVILIAN LIVES.

3. IN OTHER PARTS OF THE CONVERSATION, DRAPER LAID PARTICULAR STRESS ON THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

-- WE WERE NOT WEDDED TO ANY PARTICULAR MEANS OF ASSUAGING CONCERNS ABOUT SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON, BUT BELIEVED IT WAS IN SYRIA'S OWN NATIONAL INTEREST TO DO SO. THERE WAS A VERY SERIOUS HUMAN OR HUMANITARIAN

DIMENSION TO THE CURRENT PROBLEM. MANY PEOPLE IN CHRISTIAN BEIRUT, FAR EXCEEDING THE NUMBER WHO ORDINARILY WENT TO THE MOUNTAINS IN THE SUMMERTIME, HAD FLED. OTHERS WERE MOVING OUT OF THE CHRISTIAN HEARTLAND AREA WHERE THE LATEST CLASHES HAD TAKEN PLACE. THERE WERE LONG LINES DAILY AT OUR EMBASSY OF PEOPLE APPLYING FOR VISAS. DRAPER SAID IT WAS PARTICULARLY IRONIC THAT DURING THE CIVIL CONFLICT, MANY LEBANESE HAD SOUGHT AND FOUND REFUGE IN SYRIA.

-- SAYING THAT HE WAS USING THE TERM WITH GREAT CARE, DRAPER SAID THERE WAS PANIC AMONG SOME ELEMENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN POPULATION. THIS WORD HAD COME TO HIM THROUGH

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PEOPLE WITH NO LEBANESE OR ARAB BLOOD IN THEIR VEINS AND WITH NO POLITICAL AX TO GRIND. CHRISTOPHER

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